

**Title:** Breathing New Life Into Cities Of The Dead

**Primary Subject Area:** Social Studies – Louisiana History  
Historic Structures, Cultural Landscapes

**Grade Level:** 7<sup>th</sup> or 8<sup>th</sup> grades

**Overview:**

Cemeteries are universal in all settlements and are excellent historic sites that can be used to study culture, explore the physical and economic growth of a city, and aid in the study of architectural styles. New Orleans has more than forty cemeteries within the reach of the immediate urban and suburban areas. An exploration of more than one cemetery will allow the students to compare and contrast many elements of culture. Besides helping students learn more about their heritage, the lesson will employ map reading abilities and utilize critical thinking skills in determining economic, political and social factors that caused such diversity in the location and make-up of the various cemeteries of the area. Cemeteries not only bring the past to the present but also connect students with a new way to study many disciplines. This lesson uses “place” as the focal point of discovery, with the “people” aspect only secondary. In exploring this type of institution, various higher learning skills can be accessed as students “read” the history provided by burial customs, geographic factors and unique cultural elements.

**Approximate Duration:** 6 class periods initially, one field trip day and 2 class periods to prepare final project (If no field trip is possible, then the initial 6 days will be sufficient.)

**Louisiana Framework**

**Foundation Skills:**

- Problem Solving
- Resource Access and Utilization
- Citizenship

**Strands and Content Standards:**

- Geography: Physical and Cultural Systems
  - Places and Regions
- Civics: Citizenship and Government
  - Roles of the Citizen
- History: Historical Thinking
  - Louisiana History

**Benchmarks:**

**Social Studies**

- G-1B-M1, G-1B-M2, G-1B-M4, G-1C-M2, G-1C-M5
- C-1D-M4
- H-1A-M1, h-1A-M4, H-1A-M6
- H-1D-M5, H-1D-M6

**ELA/Technology Strategies**

ELA-5-M2, ELA-5-M3, ELA-5-M4

**Interdisciplinary Connections:**

History	Sociology
Geography	Reference Skills
Computer Skills	Architecture
Language Arts	
Civics	

**Materials:**

Computer with Internet if possible. (books on the topic will serve as an alternative  
Maps of the city)  
Hand-out exercises  
Books (some suggested volumes are listed in the bibliography)  
Cameras  
Blank CDs  
Videos on St. Louis #1 and on Metairie Cemetery

**Technology Connection**

**Hardware:** Computer with Internet capabilities

Scanner  
CD Burner  
Digital camera

**Web Sites:**

<http://www.saveourcemeteries.org/com/>  
<http://www.vatcom.com/neworl/lifestyle/cemetery.html>  
<http://www.neworleansweb.org/deadcity.html>  
<http://www.nopdonline.com/cem.htm>  
<http://www.atneworleans.com/body/cecemeteries.htm>  
<http://members.aol.com/crescentcem/index.html>  
<http://www.geocities.com/Street/6157/>  
<http://www.webcorp.com/images/nocemeteries.htm>  
<http://www.tourneworleans.com/>

**Technology Guidelines:**

A template will be provided to help students organize their power point presentation. The key elements will be listed but students are free to enhance their presentation as they see fit. Through this project, students will learn to scan photographs and data and, when their work is completed, they will be instructed on creating a CD containing their presentations.

**Background Information:**

One needs only to see the tour buses lined up in front of many of the city's cemeteries to understand that this is a unique phenomenon that is worth exploring.

Because of the Mediterranean heritage of our area, above the ground burials are common both by tradition and because of a high water table problem.

The cemeteries of our city can be used as a measuring stick for the development of its culture and its physical growth. Initially, as New Orleans was predominately French Catholic, the cemeteries features similar tombs. As the city grew with an influx of Americans and other ethnic groups after the Louisiana Purchase, the character and the architecture of the cemeteries altered to accommodate new trends. Burials were always on the outskirts of the settled areas; therefore, locating the various cemeteries offers a study in the physical growth patterns of the city.

A comparison of St. Louis # 1 (1789) our oldest remaining place of burial with the relatively new Metairie Cemetery (1872), will afford students the opportunity to see a differences in ethnic diversity, technology available for stone carving and building styles, and give them a grasp of the demographic movements within this period of time.

### **Lesson Procedures:**

#### **Day 1**

- General discussion about burial customs in their own families.
- Short introduction about cemeteries in general
- Give out maps and phone books to students in groups of 4-5
- Students are to locate six cemeteries given on a list by outlining the area of each cemetery (on map, aerial view)  
(St. Louis #1, St. Louis #2, St. Patrick #1, Metairie Cemetery, Lafayette Cemetery, Odd Fellows Rest)
- When each group has outlined the assigned cemeteries, a discussion would ensue about patterns or deductions about the locations of these cemeteries.

#### **Day 2**

- Using the Internet Web sites provided by the teacher, each group would be assigned one cemetery to research. Items that need to be covered would be: Date of founding, ethnic background of area of location, types of tombs, general design of the cemetery, and a listing of famous or interesting people buried within and short biographies.
- Students in each group would summarize their findings and prepare a handout for the other groups.

#### **Day 3**

- Students view documentary on St. Louis #1 (20 min)
- Students view documentary on Metairie Cemetery (23 min)
- Brief discussion about comparisons and contrasts

#### **Day 4**

- Introduction or recall of architectural styles unit
- Explanation of these styles as applied to funeral art
- Exploration of the use of symbolism in funeral art
- Worksheet on specific styles of tombs (included with lesson)
- Discussion of types of tombs (mausoleums, tumulus, cenotaphs)

#### **Day 5**

- Speaker from “Save Our Cemeteries” foundation (in other areas experts in this field can be found)

- Discussion of stewardship in preserving sacred places
- Suggestions of practical roles that can be played by young people in helping to preserve cemeteries and other such areas

### **Field Trip to St. Louis #1**

- Students will be divided into groups of approximately 15 to better view the cemetery
- Cameras, either digital or regular, will be distributed to each group and a selected student will photograph while another student records the data that is pertinent to each picture.
- Other students in the groups must keep track of the route taken in the cemetery and make brief notes on the information discussed by the tour guide.

### **Day 6 (7 if field trip is taken)**

- Students will be assigned a Power Point presentation to summarize all they have learned in the process of this study. At least two weeks will be given before the due date to allow them to organize their work, get film developed, if not digital, and to prepare themselves for their oral and visual presentation to the class.  
Two additional class periods may need to be used to complete this assignment.

### **Reproducible Materials:**

Pictures of tombs in Metairie Cemetery were taken from the book, *Louisiana COD (Cities of the Dead)* by Gaspar J. “Buddy” Stall pp. 75-82.

### **Assessment Procedures:**

Participation in group activities  
Graded Architectural Styles worksheet  
Notes and photos from field trip  
Final project – Power Point preparation  
Presentation to class

### **Exploration and Extension:**

- Actual stewardship program participation (Save Our Cemeteries has a volunteer clean-up program in which students as young as Junior High can help)
- Later in the year there will be a trip to tour Metairie Cemetery and we will visit Lafayette Cemetery more briefly as we tour the Garden District

### **Resources:**

Florence, Robert. City of the Dead A Journey Through St.Louis Cemetery  
#1 The Center for Louisiana Studies, University of

Southwestern Louisiana, Lafayette, 1996

Florence, Robert. New Orleans Cemeteries Life in the Cities of the Dead  
Batture Press, New Orleans, 1997.

Gandolfi, Henri. Metairie Cemetery: An Historical Memoir Stewart  
Enterprises, New Orleans. 1981

Huber, Leonard, et al. New Orleans Architecture: The Cemeteries,  
Pelican Publishing, Gretna, 1989.

Stall, Gaspar. Louisiana COD (Cities of the Dead) Buddy Stall Publishers,  
Metairie, LA 2000.

Starr, S. Frederick. Southern Comfort: The Garden District of New  
Orleans 1800-1900 Cambridge, Massachusetts 18989.

New Orleans Magazine, "Julia Street" letter concerning Odd  
Fellows Rest Cemetery, May, 1996.

## **ARCHITECTURAL STYLES IN CEMETERIES**

Accessing what we have learned about architectural styles, or by using your notes on architectural styles (*Field Guide to American Houses* by Virginia and Lee McAlester and LA Division of Historic Preservation's *LA Studies Historic Preservation Supplement*) determine which category each represents. Give at least one reason you selected this style.

A. \_\_\_\_\_

B. \_\_\_\_\_

C. \_\_\_\_\_

D. \_\_\_\_\_

E. \_\_\_\_\_

F. \_\_\_\_\_

G. \_\_\_\_\_

H. \_\_\_\_\_

I. \_\_\_\_\_

Explain why one might see so many different architectural styles represented in a cemetery? \_\_\_\_\_